

### **Women's voices: Social supports: Blathnaid's story**

A lot of my friends at the time didn't have babies and this brought its own challenges, as it sometimes felt that our lives were very different and I felt left behind or boring, and they couldn't always relate to the things I was experiencing. But I did find that spending time with them was often a nice break from all things motherhood, and I could indulge then in a before version of myself.

I was lucky enough to have a best friend, I am lucky enough to have a best friend, who already had children when I had a baby and talking to her in a very honest way was often what saved my sanity, on many a day, when I thought that I was failing or that I was going mad, or I wanted to complain without feeling like I was being judged. With her, I could talk about all the more intimate stuff as well and ask those embarrassing questions, the 'Am I normal?' 'Is this normal?' stuff.

Things about my body changing, things about sex, things about stuff maybe I mightn't say to a family member or I mightn't say to the doctor, but I really wanted to talk about. And it was so reassuring to have a friend that I could do that with.

I'm not really a hugely social person but I did try and get to those, to some 'Mother and Baby' meet-ups and classes which were very beneficial, I think, at the time, and I think these groups could be fantastic especially if, like me, a lot of your friends don't have babies. What I did find hugely helpful, apart from having a friend I could be 100% honest with, was following different mothering accounts on Instagram. I purposively stayed away from celebrity mums, or any account that I felt promoted a pressurised or unrealistic version of motherhood. And I followed a lot of postnatal mental health accounts, which helped me normalise a lot of my struggles, and some light hearted and comical mothering accounts, because I found the humour, the humorous take on parenting, provided some much needed light hearted relief.

Having a baby is such a life changing event and it can be difficult, but being able to reach out and let people support and be there in it with you really can make such a difference and can ease those difficult times and enhance your overall wellbeing and experience. Accepting support is never, ever a weakness. For me, personally, the old saying 'It takes a village to raise a child' is as true today as it ever was.